The Politics of Vulnerability: Constructing Local Performance Regimes for Homeland Security

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Abstract

Paradoxically, the greater the national security threats, the more important the role of local policy in the United States. In this article we examine homeland security initiatives—particularly the tension between risk and vulnerability—and the governance dilemmas they pose for local communities. In contrast to the usual emphasis on coordination and capacity, we argue for conceptualizing local imperatives attendant to homeland security as collective action problems requiring the construction of local performance regimes. Performance regimes must engage three challenges: (1) to enlist diverse stakeholders around a collective local security goal despite varying perceptions of its immediacy; (2) to persuade participants to sustain their involvement in the face of competing demands, and (3) to create a durable coalition around performance goals necessary for reducing local vulnerability. Using these analytic categories casts local homeland security issues in strategic terms; it also encourages comparisons of local governance arrangements to respond to risk and vulnerability.

Regardless of the national character of homeland security policy, the reality is that all terrorism is local. Ultimately so are all security initiatives. Paradoxically, the greater the national security threats, the more important the local role in the United States. In this article we examine the attributes of homeland security initiatives—particularly the tension between risk and vulnerability—and the governance dilemmas they pose for local communities. In contrast to the usual emphasis on coordination and capacity, we argue for conceptualizing local imperatives attendant to homeland security as collective action problems requiring the construction of local performance regimes. These local governance arrangements are capable of bringing about systemic changes in how security issues are addressed at the local level, giving a strategic direction and priority to vulnerability issues.

This is more than a matter of coordination: these performance regimes must engage three challenges: (1) to overcome asymmetrical incentives and enlist diverse stakeholders around a collective local security goal despite varying perceptions of its immediacy; (2) to persuade participants to sustain their involvement in the face of competing demands, and (3) to overcome collective action problems to create a durable coalition around performance goals necessary to reducing local vulnerability. Using these analytic categories casts local homeland security issues in strategic terms; it also encourages comparisons with similar initiatives in other cities—not in terms of funding but in terms of improving local responsiveness and resilience in dealing with risk and vulnerability. While the need for coordination and capacity is irrefutable, an exclusive focus on these functionalist and managerial emphases limits our ability to develop concepts and theories useful for the analysis of homeland security policies, much less the politics of vulnerability.
All Terrorism is Local

Terrorism is location-specific. Cities especially are at risk. Although the prospects for terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure in nonmetropolitan areas are a real concern, to date terrorist attacks are a particularly urban phenomenon. According to Savitch’s (2003) calculations of data in the United States State Department’s Annual Report on Global Terrorism (2002), between 1993 and 2000, 94% of the injuries and 61% of deaths from terrorist attacks took place in cities. This is not surprising since cities are centers of power, the focus of media attention, and sufficiently complex to hide terrorist activities.

This very complexity and interdependence of urban settings puts them at risk: they are highly engineered environments subject to the hazards of tight coupling (Prieto, 2003). Indeed, cities are the most tightly coupled systems we have. They also represent the greatest concentration of resources and personnel available to respond to attacks, the greatest concentration of health and human resources, and the sites for the most equipment and infrastructure needed to protect and respond in cities. In a very real sense, city stability and security is a key national security issue.

Vulnerability stems from this very complexity and interdependence. While a focus on reducing risk directs attention to mitigating or containing the phenomenon causing harm to a community—whether it be fire, floods, or terrorist attacks—vulnerability encompasses the community’s responsiveness and resilience in the face of loss (Mitchell, 1999, 2003, 2004; Pelling, 2003; Vale & Campanella, 2005). In hazards management terms, vulnerability includes the ability to absorb losses and “bounce back”; this capacity for responding to loss is variable over time and space and contingent on local choices. Cities can share the same risk of terrorism, therefore, but exhibit different vulnerabilities by developing different levels of resistance and resilience.

The parallel between hazards management policy and the evolution of homeland security policies is instructive. United States hazards policies tended to initially focus on risk and then broaden the focus to incorporate vulnerability issues, including a more holistic view of vulnerability that includes exposure, susceptibility, resistance, resilience, and adaptation (Cutter, Richardson, & Wilbanks, 2003; Pelling, 2003). In homeland security policies, however, the emphasis continues to be on risk with only limited attention to fixed vulnerable structures and infrastructure (Mitchell, 2004). Mitchell (2004) criticizes the national emphasis on defense rather than security, on risk rather than vulnerability, on technological fixes rather than causal analyses: he emphasizes the need to reframe the hazard of terrorism more broadly. Processes for constructing less vulnerable urban settings can be encouraged, as they are now, by national policies supporting vulnerability reduction through training, infrastructure protection, and first responder support. But the larger issue is not only reframing national policy objectives to encompass vulnerability and resilience but also understanding the political implications of a distinction between assessing risk—whether a location will experience an attack—and reducing vulnerability—the extent to which a potential attack will affect that location.

Reducing the risk of terrorist attacks on urban areas is unquestionably an important national policy priority. Reducing the vulnerability of urban populations is less
obviously so. Both risk and vulnerability priorities are essential elements of an effective national security policy but neither is that tractable. To the extent that vulnerabilities are constructed through our choices and our institutional forms, the politics of vulnerability emerges from the ways in which our decentralized political system inadvertently creates multiple local vulnerabilities.

The Federal Context for Homeland Security Politics

The federal context, therefore, is key to understanding how and why national homeland security policies create local governance dilemmas. The urgency of implementing national security initiatives at the local level and the perception of continuing terrorist threats highlight local roles. A national homeland security policy oriented to the notion of national hometown security (National League of Cities [NLC], 2002) would distinguish more carefully between risk and vulnerability: this would enhance our ability to identify likely local targets and to develop a strategy for resistance and recovery (Savitch, 2003). If ever there were a time for the reemergence of an urban policy agenda, this should be it. What we face, however, are institutional designs and dynamics that discourage this broader policy orientation and sensitivity to local vulnerabilities.

Budgeting for Homeland Security

Budgetary struggles between Congress and the executive branch are unexceptional features of national political processes. To find them complicating homeland security initiatives is unsurprising but for the exceptional character of this policy issue. One of the most important factors conditioning national homeland security policy responses is the White House and Congress’s limited view of vulnerability and the persistence of conventional political formulae as Congress addresses constituents’ risk reduction through Congressional budget processes.

The level of funding for homeland security continues to increase dramatically (see OMB, 2004). In October 2004, President George W. Bush signed the FY2005 Homeland Security Appropriations Act providing $28.9 billion in net discretionary spending for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a 6.6% increase in funding over the previous year and a 106% increase since 2003. The act includes a total of $4 billion for state and local assistance programs. In particular, state-based formula grants are funded at $1.5 billion, including $400 million for law enforcement; the majority of funding goes for first responder grants ($1,100M) through the Office of Domestic Preparedness, now the lead agency for state and local government homeland security programs. This is a reduction from the FY2004 levels ($1,700M) but greater than the level initially proposed by the White House. The “all hazards” Emergency Management Performance Grant program (previously FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration]) is funded at $180 million. Similarly, firefighter assistance grants (previously FEMA) going directly to local fire departments (again with the “all hazards” focus) are funded at $650 million, with another $65 million for hiring, compared with the request of $500 million. The bill also provides a total of $315 million in transportation security
Significant shares of these expenditures on military and security priorities are directed to state and local governments. Nondefense expenditures to states and localities—generally for homeland security—are growing at a much higher rate of increase than similar grants for community development and are approaching their share of outlays (Figure 1).

The allocation of funds, however, is as significant as overall levels of spending. Despite the urgency and immediacy of terrorism threats, we find Congress allocating funds more on the basis of traditional formulae than vulnerabilities assessment. Concerns persist that the patterns of domestic homeland security expenditures continue to reflect pork barrel politics rather than patterns of risk and vulnerability (e.g., Coats & Tollison, forthcoming; San Francisco Chronicle, 2005). The 9/11 Commission, for example, recommended that state and local homeland security assistance should be allocated strictly on risk and vulnerability assessments. It remains troubled that federal homeland security assistance should not remain a program “for general revenue sharing” (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States, 2004, p. 396).

In part this funding pattern can be attributed to formula-based grants (such as the First Responder and Law Enforcement grants) allocated using a per-state minimum of 0.75%, with the remainder allocated on the basis of population. Indeed, Coats and Tollison (forthcoming, p. 10) argue that this minimum state allocation “means that per capita funding is more related to electoral votes per capita, i.e., the less populous states, and thus, the value of a vote to the reelection of the

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**Figure 1.** Percentage (%) of Total Outlays for Housing and Urban Development and Homeland Security

*Source:* Office of Management and Budget e/2004 and 2005 estimates OMB.
President, than to the dangers and vulnerabilities faced by states.” As a result, journalistic accounts of unneeded hazmat suits and other examples of inefficient allocation processes are rife. In addition to the inefficiency, many of these patterns send funds to more rural areas at less risk (Roberts, 2005). Of course, many vulnerable facilities are in more remote locations or are not territorially grounded, but the key targets, facilities, resources, expertise, and populations are in cities.5

### Spending on Local Needs

Since 2003, however, there is some evidence of greater sensitivity to spatial variations in risk: Congress slowly increased the funding for port and railroad security and reorganized territorial funding to target the higher risk levels in urban areas.6 The Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) program began in 2002 by directing funds to 7 urban areas (New York City, Washington, DC, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle) seen as at high risk of terrorist attack; it currently distributes funds to 50 cities (ranging in FY2004 from New York City, $47M to Santa Ana, CA, $15M to Anaheim, CA, $10M to San Antonio, TX, at $6.3M) based on risk assessments by the Department of Homeland Security.7 What appears to be massive proposed increases in funding in FY 2004 and 2005, however, reflects efforts at consolidation of FEMA and TSA (Transportation Security Administration) program funding in Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) (at the expense of First Responder grants) rather than funding increases. Indeed, UASI grants are funded at $885 million in FY 2005, below the request of $1.45 billion (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2004a). Overall, a larger share of antiterrorism grants is now going to larger cities, for example, New York funding increased to $208 million in fiscal 2005, compared with $47 million in 2004 (Lipton, 2004).

Tensions between Congress and the White House over funding allocation criteria and mechanisms are stark. In current struggles, the White House is critical of congressional preferences for state grant programs rather than UASI targeting (OMB, 2004). The OMB and the White House support first responder funding but argue for better targeting through the risk-based UASI program (OMB, 2004). Similarly, the White House is less interested in the “all-hazard” approach of the formerly FEMA programs for Emergency Management and Firefighter grants. In May 2005, the House passed H.R. 1544 to consolidate the State Homeland Security Grant Program, the Local Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Grant Program, and the Urban Area Security Initiative Grant Program. H.R. 1544 also would create a competitive grant formula where each state would receive a minimum of 0.25% of federal funds based on the threat of risk (states with an international land border or international port would receive at least 0.45% of the baseline formula) rather than the 0.75 currently assured on the basis of population. In contrast, the original Senate bill S. 21, the Homeland Security Grant Enhancement Act of 2005, would provide each state a minimum 0.55% risk-based funding. The White House favors the more restrictive 0.25 funding formula and would require cities to use their state homeland security grants to cover programs being eliminated, effectively pitting cities against each other and forcing priorities (Nation’s Cities Weekly, 2005).
Congress forestalled efforts by the Bush administration to eliminate funding for the HOPE VI housing program, Section 8 Loan Guarantees, and Urban Empowerment Zones as well as attempts to convert the Section 8 voucher program into a block grant going directly to Public Housing Authorities. Congress reinstated Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and deflected the White House’s efforts to move the agency to the Department of Commerce. As it is, CDBG funding in FY2005 is down to $4,709M from $4,934M in 2004. This displacement of traditional state and local funding streams and the convergence of homeland security and community development outlays suggest that homeland security policy may emerge as the new urban policy of the 21st century.

The funds themselves are distributed through a wide array of mechanisms, with a significant reliance on categorical programs and poorly funded mandates (see Table 1).

### Table 1. Comparison of Funding Levels for Key Municipal Programs in Enacted FY 2005 Budget

[The United States Conference of Mayors](http://www.usmayors.org/ucsm/us_mayor_newspaper)

November 30, 2004

(Dollars in Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>FY 2004 Enacted</th>
<th>FY 2005 Proposed</th>
<th>FY 2005 Enacted</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOMELAND SECURITY</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Responder Grant</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Threat Areas Program</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>1,452</td>
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<td>Homeland Security Law Enforcement</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Firefighter Grants</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>650</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology Transfer Program</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire Department Staffing Assistance Grants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Search and Rescue</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-Risk-NonProfit Organization Grants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Management Performance Grants</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bio-Terrorism (HHS State &amp; Local Capacity)</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>934</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aviation Passenger Screening</td>
<td>1,801</td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>2,049</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aviation Baggage Screening</td>
<td>1,166</td>
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<td>1,227</td>
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<tr>
<td>Port Security Grants</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rail/Transit Security Grants (DHS)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rail/Transit Security Grants (TSA)</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td><strong>HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
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<td>Community Development Block Grant</td>
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<td>4,618</td>
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<td>HOME Investment Partnership</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>2,084</td>
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<td>Public Housing Operating Subsidies</td>
<td>3,579</td>
<td>3,573</td>
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<td>Public Housing Capital Fund</td>
<td>2,696</td>
<td>2,674</td>
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<td>HOPE VI</td>
<td>149</td>
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<td>144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS</td>
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<td>295</td>
<td>284</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section 202 Elderly/Section 811 Disabled</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>987</td>
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<td>Section 108 Loan Guarantees</td>
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<td>Section 8 Rental Assistance</td>
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<td>Urban Empowerment Zones</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Economic Development Administration</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>257</td>
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<td><strong>HUMAN SERVICES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary Assistance to Needy Families</td>
<td>19,609</td>
<td>17,149</td>
<td>1,714</td>
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<td>Child Care &amp; Development Block Grant</td>
<td>2,078</td>
<td>2,090</td>
<td>2,090</td>
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<td>Head Start</td>
<td>6,775</td>
<td>6,944</td>
<td>6,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services Block Grant</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>1,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Services Block Grant</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>641</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSPORTATION</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Aid Highway</td>
<td>33,600</td>
<td>33,600</td>
<td>34,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the appeals of urban mayors and presidential support for direct allocations of funding, most homeland security funds are allocated to the states to “pass-through” to subnational units. Although states are required to pass-through no less than 80% of the allocated funds, many do so haltingly. One report in early 2004 estimated that 76% of cities still had not received any money from the First Responders program (United States Conference of Mayors, 2004). Mayors characterize this as sending homeland security funds to the states by Federal Express but it arriving at cities by Pony Express. Moreover, cities are not typically involved in planning allocation of UASI funds at the state level (United States Conference of Mayors, 2004), and many states direct funds to counties rather than to cities. Although many cities note increased regional cooperation on homeland security in the last few years (NLC, 2002), jurisdictional lines continue to hamper sustained joint efforts.

In recent addresses, Homeland Defense Secretary Michael Chertoff has acknowledged the need to cooperate with local authorities in providing security. Following the attacks in London on July 7, 2005, for instance, Chertoff announced:

We have asked state and local leaders and transportation officials to increase their protective measures, including additional law enforcement police, bomb detecting canine teams, increased video surveillance, spot-testing in certain areas, added perimeter barriers, extra intrusion detection equipment, and increased numbers of inspection of trash receptacles and other storage areas. (Chertoff, July 7, 2005)

Moreover, in his proposed realignment of the Department of Homeland Security, Chertoff recognized private and public partnerships and local agencies as essential collaborators in securing United States vulnerabilities (Chertoff, July 25, 2005). The institutional context, nevertheless, skews these initiatives toward risk orientations and congressional priorities, slighting local vulnerabilities.

Federalism As a Conditioning Factor for Homeland Security Policies

Despite efforts such as the risk-oriented National Response Plan unveiled in January 2005 to standardize and unify homeland security approaches, our decentralized federal structure constitutes a historically weak state apparatus. It features loose and weak integration of different governmental authorities, little horizontal integration or coordination across different jurisdictional and regional scales, notoriously low levels of intergovernmental funding (Savitch & Kantor, 2002, p. 76), and few integrative mechanisms, such as strong party systems, to overcome these structural features. As a result of these institutional features, national homeland security policies are likely to retain their narrow risk focus and unlikely to adequately respond to local vulnerabilities.

Federalism, therefore, is an especially significant factor conditioning homeland security: our institutional arrangements and cultural practices make any highly centralized and coherent practices difficult to carry out. In addition, the disincentives for cooperation and coordination embedded in what scholars see as a “weak state apparatus” are legion. At a minimum, both national institutional dynamics and metropolitan politics and patronage can thwart any concerted security initiatives.
Local priorities and needs are broadly based so there are many opportunities for local officials to set the agenda—their incentives include responding to local constituencies, and particularly to a climate of vulnerability. Cities are concerned with security but deal with many competing priorities (NLC, 2002; Eisinger, 2004), including conventional public safety, economic concerns, and budget problems (especially the lack of reimbursement for security expenses in response to federal mandates). In a 2005 survey of American cities, the National League of Cities found that homeland security ranked 30 out of 38 issues cities felt would be the most important to address in the next two years (NLC, 2005, p. 32). Over 46% of the cities responding reported that homeland security/emergency preparedness had improved in the last year and 54% considered it to be only a minor problem. Similarly, just two years after 9/11, the Century Foundation’s analysis of four states found “business as usual” with little significant improvement in security efforts (Kettl, 2003a). Even within the security agenda, state and local priorities favor responsiveness and protection of assets, while officials such as Governor Mitt Romney (R-MA) urge them to take on intelligence and surveillance functions (DHS, 2004b).

**Homeland Security Policies from the Bottom Up**

The federal system deflects national security initiatives: the decentralized federalism in the United States appears to be capable of refracting and diffusing even the most profound security initiatives. Given these institutional constraints, any effective national security strategy is contingent on local actions. National security policy will be reconstructed from the bottom up: the local arena is where national homeland security policies are adapted to local needs. For local governments, their preparedness efforts appear to be shaped by internal capacity as much as by threat perceptions. How that capacity is generated in the face of resource shortages and competing priorities is problematic. Gerber et al. (2005, p. 185) pinpoint this tension:

> While the national government has strong incentives for promoting hazard mitigation and preparedness, state and local governments face certain disincentives to proactive management and often lack the administrative capacity or commitment for effective policies. As a result, state and local governments frequently do not develop a level of capacity for, and commitment to, effective disaster policy that matches their responsibilities.

Their survey of local governments finds that threat perception does not affect preparedness efforts as much as internal administrative capacity, underlining the importance of basic resource availability and relative vulnerabilities.

**More Than Coordination and Capacity**

This emphasis on coordination and local capacity parallels the hazard literature approach to managing local disasters and hazards. It draws from theories of public management and organizational theory, emphasizing public sector leadership and coordination of multiple public sector actors (Kettl, 2003b). Much of the scholarly literature on homeland security follows suit. But the evidence suggests that more
than coordination and capacity issues are hampering local homeland security efforts.

We face a paradox: the greater the national security threats, the more important the local role, but that role appears to be problematic and contested. It is possible that this uneven local role can be attributed to budget constraints, institutional inertia, insufficient support and incentives from the federal government, or basic shortsightedness, as the Century Foundation suggests (Kettl, 2003a). But isolating these factors overlooks the extent to which lagging local responses are best seen as collective action problems. The argument here is that questions of local capacity and coordination are most effectively conceptualized as governance issues: the creation of local governance arrangements are necessary to bring about systemic changes in how security issues are addressed at the local level and to give a strategic direction and priority to local vulnerability issues.

**Local Governance for Homeland Security**

In many ways, it is appropriate for the federal government to focus on risk. The federal government must fight the war on terrorism on several fronts. Not only are governmental functions at risk, but also corporations, airlines, critical infrastructure, educational facilities, and private residences are vulnerable to attacks. Thus far, the federal government has left the market more or less unregulated, hoping that a market for homeland security will develop naturally. To some extent, this has occurred with greater demand for “safe rooms” in private residences, and the purchasing of duct tape and plastic sheeting during raised terror alerts issued by the DHS (Crank & Gregor, 2005, pp. 125–138). However, such markets have been short-lived responses to temporary alerts, and no real permanent market exists.

Do incentives exist for private industries or corporations to undertake security measures, both within their own properties and as contributions to society? Not likely. The private sector has less incentive to prepare for the long-term effects of terrorist attacks than do government agencies or the population at large for three main reasons. First, there are “contamination effects.” Under these circumstances, a catastrophic risk faced by one firm is determined in part by the behavior of another. In other words, poor security at one establishment can affect security at others, resulting in weakened incentives for security precautions because the potential costs of such precautions are much too high (Orszag, 2003). Second, catastrophic financial damage by a terrorist attack will presumably result in bailouts from the government. The airline industry is one such example. Instead of immediate bankruptcy, the airline industry received a substantial subsidy from the United States government until it could sustain itself reasonably well (O’Hanlon et al., 2002, p. 81). Finally, if private corporations or businesses suffer grave financial consequences due to a terrorist attack, they may have to declare bankruptcy. However, if they declare bankruptcy, the “extent of the losses beyond that which would bankrupt the firm would be irrelevant to the firm’s owners” (O’Hanlon et al., 2002, p. 81). With limited resources and a decentralized federal structure of government, the national government cannot confront location-specific vulnerabilities for each city.
National risk-oriented initiatives will continue to dominate homeland security thinking, but local communities must organize to address vulnerabilities: risk-based programs alone cannot prepare cities for the damaging effects of an attack. As a result, national security priorities necessitate a focus on local governance strategies that successfully address vulnerability. The governance issue is more than coordination or capacity: how can local governments create the governance arrangements needed to address homeland security issues? These governance arrangements emerge in the absence of sufficient authority to get things done—neither the market nor governmental authority is sufficient to produce the desired security.

**A Governance Perspective on Local Vulnerabilities**

Given that government measures alone are insufficient to produce acceptable outcomes in counterterrorism, and that markets have few incentives to do so, a governance perspective directs our attention to ways in which the resources of both government and the private sector are coordinated to strengthen local responses to vulnerabilities.

Local governance arrangements constructed to deal with vulnerability issues reach beyond formal government institutions. Taking a governance approach to analyzing these new local arrangements is essential: it extends the scope of analysis to a range of public–private interactions and exchanges, rather than limiting analysis to formal state institutions; it also emphasizes steering and coordination of a range of diverse actors (Pierre, 2000). Local governance arrangements centered on vulnerability agendas involve multiple stakeholders, reach across jurisdictions, and bring together both public and private actors (Eisinger, 2004; Savitch, 2003). Each controls strategic resources necessary to “solve” the problem of hometown security and local vulnerabilities.

For systemic change to occur, participants must generate enough cooperation to make effective decisions about local vulnerabilities under trying conditions—that is, craft decision processes that satisfy shared purposes, that reduce the costs of making complex decisions, and that are seen as legitimate and fair by those involved. Coalition and network building is a particular governance strategy to solve collective action dilemmas. These alternative arrangements integrate informal relationships among public and private sector actors for collaborative decisions and implementation of policies to reduce vulnerabilities.

This governance approach is similar to a political ecology approach which considers communities as “consisting of loosely-coupled, heterogeneous ecological elements and networks” with unequal distributions of power and resources (Tierney, Lindell, & Perry, 2001, p. 21). It goes further however by specifying the coalitional strategies adopted to generate “enough cooperation” to get things done (C.N. Stone, 1989) and highlighting the discursive aspects of the coalition building process.

**Constructing Performance Regimes Around Vulnerability Concerns**

Thinking in terms of coalitions acknowledges that the cooperation and collaboration necessary to reduce local risk and vulnerability will not emerge automatically,
even given the dire nature and urgency of security threats (see also, Birkland, 1997, 2004). As in other policy arenas, coalitions will have to be pieced together, using a combination of incentives and coercion. Urban theorists draw on regime theory to characterize these coalition-building processes, with long-standing intersectoral coalitions labeled as regimes. Governing regimes are distinguished from periodic and opportunistic coalitions by their persistence and coherence: even though regime participants may have disparate interests, they share a common understanding of a problem and preferred solutions (e.g., how to encourage local economic growth). Their long-term cooperation stems from these shared beliefs and is often encouraged by the distribution of “small opportunities” or side-payments—the “glue” that holds coalitions together (C.N. Stone, 1989).

In contrast to governing regimes, performance regimes are driven and distinguished by a performance imperative, rather than distributional benefits (see Stone, 1998). They require motivating stakeholders to make the outcomes—improved hometown security and reduced vulnerabilities—rather than the small opportunities or the perks, such as individual program budgets, buildings, or staff the central concern. Constructing a performance coalition, therefore, is more than a matter of coordination: it involves developing a shared understanding of local vulnerabilities and potential solutions as well as encouraging the active participation of diverse interests in collaborative activities focused on performance outcomes. This requires establishing a new set of political arrangements with performance as the focal concern.

These are much more difficult governance tasks than those facing regimes organized to distribute the costs and benefits of more conventional local policy choices. Even though many of the players and issues may be the same, the key factor is a new set of relationships and motivation. In some ways, the ability to create performance regimes may be contingent on the nature of more core local regimes, for example, the existence of intersectoral ties, trust, histories of cooperation, and negotiation. The implication is that multiple types of homeland security regimes may emerge from the bottom up as communities adapt national policies and programs to their understandings of their vulnerabilities.

**The Politics of Vulnerability: Mobilizing, Sustaining, and Institutionalizing Local Performance Regimes**

The concept of performance regimes is especially useful in capturing the politics of vulnerability. Because vulnerabilities are location-specific and context-sensitive, no one national management plan or program directive could fit all circumstances. Each locale needs to pull together the necessary stakeholders across sectors to generate “enough cooperation” to address their particular vulnerabilities. But all performance regimes must engage three challenges: (1) to overcome asymmetrical incentives and enlist diverse stakeholders around a collective goal despite varying perceptions of its immediacy; (2) to persuade participants to sustain their involvement in the face of competing demands, and (3) to overcome collective action problems to create a durable coalition around performance goals. By conceptualizing local homeland security efforts in terms of constructing performance regimes, we ask how well cities overcome these mobilization, sustainability, and institutional-
ization challenges (Stone, 1998, p. 13). Governance arrangements falling short of these objectives are more likely to be, in Stone’s view (1998), more pork barrel-oriented “employment regimes” than “performance regimes” capable of systemic changes in security policies.

**Mobilizing Participation in Local Coalitions to Address Vulnerabilities**

The initial mobilization issue in creating performance regimes to address local vulnerabilities is asking who needs to be at the table. There are multiple stakeholders, across jurisdictions and both public and private sectors. There is no one hierarchical authority in charge, so there is an unprecedented need for cooperation among stakeholders who seek mutual benefits but have little experience dealing with each other. While these actors are not necessarily or likely previous partners, their cooperation is essential to achieving mutual goals. The most coherent and persistent regimes in American cities tend to be organized around economic development agendas, but they operate with little cognizance of the traditional triad of fire-police-emergency services.

**Identifying Stakeholders**—Local performance coalitions for homeland security must overcome these stovepipe or silo features to include fire/police/emergency personnel as well as public health officials, universities, and other diverse actors including private facilities and personnel, for example, corporate medical departments, private engineering and construction firms, and private infrastructure. The events of 9/11 also saw utility workers, engineers, and construction workers self-mobilize and respond (Bugliarello, 2004; Prieto, 2003). The interconnections and interdependencies that link these actors in informal governance arrangements are critical. Indeed, the patterns of linkages and interactions among these actors are as important as the actors themselves: some patterns will contribute to collaboration on vulnerability concerns; others will constrain such efforts. If there is a low level of interdependence among stakeholders, the local homeland security networks will be unstable and lack the trust necessary to operate effectively.

And it is not always clear where the table is. Cities are the key arenas, but, as noted above, funding follows a conventional paradigm: not direct funding to cities, as sought by mayors, but to states and primarily to counties. As a result, the local public sector role is often diffuse and ill-defined. While there are many reports of increased horizontal cooperation/coordination (NLC, 2005) on homeland security issues, cities do not necessarily play the key role in deciding on priorities or planning.

**Framing Vulnerability Issues**—The discursive elements of homeland security issues shape the types of coalitions constructed (Linenthal, 2005). These frames and stories about risk and vulnerability become the basis for mobilizing participants; by emphasizing some values and interests over others, the definitions of “the problem” also have consequences for the policy choices made. Frames often take the form of “causal stories” (D. Stone, 1989) in that they attribute cause to specific forces or actors and link this to projected consequences. One of the most prominent causal stories names the national security problem as the risk of external threats and immi-
nent attack, with the homeland security “solution” against constant threat requiring extraordinary military and security expenditures. To some observers, this echoes Lasswell’s warnings on the emergence of a garrison state.13

Providing Sufficient Incentives to Cooperate—More concretely, mobilization also depends on incentives to get stakeholders to the table. Incentives to cooperate often seem to be “absent, uncertain, or unevenly distributed” in the case of local homeland security efforts (Clarke, 2004). In particular, the extent to which there is broad mobilization within both the public and private sectors as well as integration with networks of “brokers,” or intermediaries, and civic organizations seems highly variable.

The most familiar incentive is funding—the small monetary opportunities that encourage cooperation. But homeland security funding is notoriously slow in reaching localities and does not necessarily fit local vulnerabilities. It often goes to off-budget entities such as port authorities and utilities or it is earmarked for particular local services such as public safety and disaster management. Furthermore, for private sector groups, the incentives to participate or stay at the table may be less compelling. It is clear, for example, that critical infrastructure—energy, health, transportation, food supply, and water systems—are vulnerable to external threats. National policies increasingly focus on these fixed assets, although funding levels remain low. But it is not clear which are most vulnerable and in what ways; nor is it clear who should pay for such an assessment and undertake improvements since substantial portions are privately owned and locally based (Orszag, 2003).

Insufficient or selective funding might be overcome by the opportunity to work toward solutions that are important to individual stakeholders and their agencies and the opportunity for gaining important information through collaboration. Participating in a performance regime means it is possible to reduce the costs of information (Gerber et al., 2005). In addition, the exchange of knowledge and shared expertise among specialists opens up the possibilities for further collaboration and brings attention to the interdependencies that must be accommodated.

Overcoming the Mobilization Challenge—If the key to successful mobilization is identifying critical players and providing incentives to bring them to the table, then the Potomac Conference Regional Task Force provides solid experience. Collaborating with the Washington Council of Governments’ Task Force on Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, the conference divided into four groups and charged each team to investigate the best possible strategies for dealing with preparedness, business and nonprofit continuity, economic recovery, and communications (Kayyem & Chang, 2003, p. 110). The Task Force included over 150 members of the community, ranging from business professionals to government employees.

The Task Force quickly identified the key stakeholders—members of the business, nonprofit, and government communities as well as individuals from nearby jurisdictions—and engaged them in meaningful dialogue concerning immediate vulnerabilities. It was able to engage the community because of the incentive of increased information and the ability to participate meaningfully in vital decisions
made within the region and to enhance partnerships for the future. While the Potomac Conference Task Force overcame a critical obstacle in local coordination, the next challenge is to maintain such partnerships.

**Sustaining Participation in Local Coalitions on Vulnerability**

Once at the table, several factors can stymie sustained involvement in efforts to elevate local security reforms to strategic agenda status. The performance regime approach highlights the importance of competing ideas about the purpose and nature of homeland security strategies as a shared goal and of alternative agendas for addressing vulnerability issues as factors limiting sustained involvement.

**Defining Shared Goals**—As the earlier discussion of state and local priorities favoring responsiveness and protection of assets indicates, even those agreeing on the need for homeland security policies may not share the same goals. Indeed, until recently, the problem space for homeland security issues remained somewhat diffuse and ill-structured—that is, there are differences of opinion on the relevant attributes of the problem and how they link to the overall goal. As a result, it is difficult to form and sustain coalitions independent of their common or divergent interests (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001, p. 102). Even though local advocates may share similar policy goals and recognize the need for “performance,” the persistence of homeland security development as an ill-structured problem can limit their sustained involvement in common initiatives.

Many of the new paradigms emerging since 9/11 contribute to this dissonance. For example, the new paradigm on infrastructure shifts attention from expanding systems and customers—the heart of local public works programs—to focus on the existing infrastructure systems’ responsiveness and their core capacity (Prieto, 2003). Rather than adding new technologies and expanding systems, the emphasis shifts to strengthening the flexibility and interconnectivity of systems currently in place. It also is reoriented to less tangible elements such as better operational and emergency response training for unexpected events (Prieto, 2003). As a result of rethinking infrastructure as a security issue, these new paradigms are not necessarily able to sustain the same constituencies motivated by the opportunities to build new infrastructure.

Sustaining and maintaining local performance regimes is especially difficult when direct threats are not evident. And, as noted above, national homeland security funding for state and local governments has been slow to build, limited in scope, and implemented through state government “pass-throughs.” Equally grave, in many cases homeland security funding increasingly is at the expense of intergovernmental funds for other programs as budgets are cut to support these new expenditures. In the absence of sufficient funding, cities turn to other types of agendas.

**Alternative Agendas**—Even though localities may reach agreement on shared goals, the values and priorities pursued by different groups could lead to alternative agendas for local security needs. Shifts in national policies and the competing values embedded in alternative security narratives encourage multiple security agendas
at the local level. Tierney (2005, p. 3) argues that ODP’s role within DHS has increased “direct ‘top-down’ oversight of local preparedness activities on a scale that had not existed prior to 9-11.” This could exacerbate tensions between preparedness and response and prevention and surveillance priorities. This often plays out in local conflicts over access to public space and in alternative definitions of appropriate and effective security strategies. For many architects and planners, the homeland security issue is framed as competing values of security, access, and mobility. When access to public spaces and physical facilities is controlled as a solution to security concerns, there are “chilling effects” on public spaces.

Agendas also are often defined in terms of technologies. The lack of information on threats and risk assessment can hamper mobilization and sustained participation. Since 2004, the Joint Regional Information Exchange System (JRIES) allows the sharing of Sensitive-but-Unclassified information between federal, state, and local agencies. This DHS computer-based system is available to all 50 states and 50 urban areas with high ratings in risk assessments to meet state and local officials’ complaints that they have no accurate information to work with. But an emphasis on information can also cast these processes too narrowly. Because domestic preparedness is information intensive, and because the United States is particularly advanced in terms of geodata collection, there is an inordinate faith in tasking local governments to use geographic information systems (GIS) to overcome the “information silos” where geodata is cached in different departments, organizations, and jurisdictions (Environmental Systems Research Institute, 2002).

Overcoming the Sustainability Challenge—One case of a successful sustaining coalition is the New York City Partnership (NYCP), which began in 1979 as a nonprofit organization devoted to investigating legislation, regulation, and other issues that affect the local business environment. Since 9/11, however, the NYCP has devoted time and efforts to rebuilding Lower Manhattan’s economy (Kayyem & Chang, 2003, pp. 110–111). Because of its clear goals, the NYCP has been able to sustain ongoing dialogues for several decades. Moreover, it has been able to shift gears to accommodate current priorities such as local homeland security needs. The main challenge is to broaden its participation to include other important stakeholders, such as local government officials. With a long-standing presence in New York City, however, the NYCP also has a clear advantage in developing the necessary informal and formal relationships to address key vulnerabilities in the city. Indeed, the partnership is currently establishing a task force on safety and security with the intention of further developing public–private cooperation (Kayyem & Chang, 2003, pp. 110–111). While the NYCP is still in its preliminary stages regarding homeland security, this entity serves as a good model of a sustaining coalition with shared goals as well as flexibility to accommodate emerging challenges.

Building a Durable Performance Regime around Local Vulnerability Needs

Even if these collective action problems are overcome and some cooperation is achieved, however, there is no guarantee these coalitions will be sustained over time. The notion of durable coalitions underscores the need for changing relationships
and replacing past dynamics with new patterns and linkages—to institutionalize these new practices. This usually requires formally organized and staffed entities able to maintain high levels of visible activity, to focus on concrete actions, and to engage in ongoing consultations between organizations. Needless to say, external resources often play an important role in sustaining such local collaborations.

But as relatively new local policies, vulnerability issues may be seen as the purview of multiple agencies; there is rarely a consensus on ownership of vulnerability problems and few accepted routines or procedures for dealing with them. A coalition’s durability also can be undermined when agencies based on command-and-control principles assume greater importance in local preparedness efforts (Tierney, 2005, p. 4) relative to other more inclusive emergency management organizations. The growing influence of law enforcement agencies in local preparedness efforts relative to emergency management organizations, for example, can threaten the durability of local coalitions to the extent that these agencies are less practiced in necessary coordination strategies (Tierney, 2005). The difficulty is sustaining and institutionalizing cooperation among “command-oriented organizations like police and fire departments” with “other types of agencies and groups that play key roles in responding to disasters but that do not operate according to hierarchical principles” (Tierney, 2005, p. 5). Overcoming this legacy of fragmentation and different management styles is central to establishing durable coalitions around performance goals.

The prospects for durable coalitions are also undermined by the lack of agreement on what lessons were “learned” from previous terrorist attacks and other disasters. Insufficient knowledge and understanding of what went wrong on 9/11 and what to do differently, for example, leads to the selection of some lessons and slighting of others. For example, a focus on radio interoperability between police and fire personnel resulted in massive purchase of radios with federal funds even if there were other priorities locally. A narrow focus on risk rather than vulnerability also limits learning from previous unpredicted and high-impact disasters that lack intentionality. But many disasters such as the SARS outbreaks and the extensive power outages in the Northeast are similar in important ways to vulnerability issues raised by terrorist attacks. These disasters underscore the importance of improving local resilience and responsiveness by developing exchanges over time between local agencies sharing similar responsibilities despite their bureaucratic structures. Sands (2003), for example, argues that utility companies in Canada and the United States responded effectively to the blackouts of 2003 because they had worked together in the past and were able to quickly establish counterparts and protocols. These coalitions were organized around performance goals and acted from the bottom up in the absence of any national directives.

Overcoming the Institutionalization Challenge—We can see the beginnings of durable coalitions in the aforementioned cases. Any long-term results are yet unobservable. However, academic institutions may be particularly useful in contributing to the durability required in performance coalitions. For instance, following 9/11, some individuals at Polytechnic University in New York City formed the Urban Security Initiative (USI). Acknowledging the need for localized, public–private partnerships to address vulnerability issues in counterterrorism, the USI provides a forum for
ongoing discourse between nongovernmental organizations, all levels of government, academic institutions, and industrial partners (Bugliarello, 2004, p. 24). Because of their unique contexts, academic environments may be well-suited to engage such discussions.

Conclusion

Using these analytic categories casts local homeland security issues in strategic terms rather than the functionalist and managerial terms of coordination and capacity. While coordination and capacity issues are real concerns at the local level, a performance regime approach highlights their problematic nature in terms of the challenges to building sustainable and durable coalitions to address local vulnerabilities. As a result, the difficulties in carrying out national homeland security initiatives at the local level can be attributed not only to insufficient and indirect funding but also to national political tensions and the local coalition-building processes demanded by these initiatives.

A governance perspective, utilizing the performance regime concept, also contributes to efforts to theorize emergency management and disaster studies (Mitchell, 2004; Tierney et al., 2001). The conceptual framework encourages comparisons with similar security initiatives in other cities—not in terms of funding but in terms of improving the responsiveness and resilience of local communities for dealing with risk and vulnerability. Comparing local performance regimes for addressing vulnerability issues is a promising research agenda, with implications for scholars and practitioners.

Notes

1 Susan E. Clarke presented an earlier version of this argument at the Thomas J. Anton/Frederick Lippitt Conference on “Homeland Security in Urban America,” Brown University, September 23–24, 2004. Marion Orr, Peter Esinger, and Hank Savitch provided useful comments and encouragement. We appreciate Luis Torres’s (CARTSS) help in collecting data and constructing the graphic.
2 Recent work at Los Alamos centers on this urban interdependence and vulnerability (Heiken et al., 2000).
3 See DHS, 2004a for budget details.
4 ODP moved from the Department of Justice to DHS; it is responsible for several territorial programs including the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the Homeland Security Grant Program, and the Metropolitan Medical Response System.
5 Advocates for rural interests argue that the federal government has reduced budgetary allocations for agriculture and rural development to devote more funds to homeland security in ways that advantage urban areas. The argument for more rural funding emphasizes the concentration of agriculture and food producing activities as well as crucial infrastructure located in rural areas—including dams, nuclear power plants, and portions of the nation’s electrical grid and interstate highway systems targets according to Johnson-Webb (2004).
6 Coats and Tollison (2005, p. 4) hypothesize that spending in the public interest, that is, targeting risk rather than political gain, increased after the 2004 elections.
7 The UASI formula (redesigned in 2004) considers population and population density; critical infrastructure; threat information; formal mutual aid cooperation; and law enforcement investigations and enforcement activity (Somers, 2004). In FY2005, New York, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles will get 42% of the money, compared with 16% for the top three cities in 2004 (Lipton, 2004).
8 The National Response Plan collapses threats from terrorism and severe natural disasters in a new term: incidents of national significance to connote incidents with high impact requiring extensive and well-coordinated response. Tierney (2005, p. 8) pointed out that this new directive overlooks
the “fact that the U. S. already had a plan for coordinating the federal response to major disasters. The existing Federal Response Plan, which had been developed in the late 1980’s and adopted in the early 1990’s, had proven effective for coordinating federal resources in a number of major national emergencies, including the 9–11 attacks.”

9 This contrasts sharply with 2002 survey results where local officials said that general public safety (62%), the condition of the local economy (55%), and infrastructure needs (44%) were the three most important issues, followed by concerns about terrorism (34%) and local economic development needs (26%). In larger cities concerns about terrorism rated higher—public safety (69%), the local economy (55%), and terrorism (55%) were the three issues cited most often (NLC, 2002).

10 Regimes are only one type of governance strategy—along with price competition in the market and networks emanating from civil society (Cox, 1997)—for dealing with collective action dilemmas.

11 See Stone (1998) for discussion of the performance regime concept; this discussion draws on Clarke’s (2005) application of this concept to workforce development issues. Also, Birkland (2004) argues that many of the ideas and interests involved in homeland security existed prior to 9/11; this event created a window of opportunity for policy change.

12 Thanks to Hank Savitch for this observation.

13 Lasswell (1941, 1962) coined the “garrison state” phrase in 1937 to warn that extensive security concerns and the constant threat of war could lead to the creation of a garrison state where “specialists in violence” and their civilian allies become the most powerful group in society. The garrison state mentality ensures that democratic institutions remain intact but a shift in power and attention toward violence and those controlling these needed skills takes place. A reliance on manipulation of symbols and rhetoric is necessary to sustain the commitment to this shift in resources and priorities: the sense of risk, vulnerability, threat, and fear becomes as critical as actual attacks (Fitch, 1985). The expectations of violence are especially powerful, with important psychological effects on citizens.

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